

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA
BRUNSWICK DIVISION

JAMES LAMAR LYONS,

Movant,

v.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,

Respondent.

CIVIL ACTION NO.: 2:19-cv-13

(Case No.: 2:06-cr-4)
(Case No.: 2:07-cr-54)

MAGISTRATE JUDGE'S REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION

This matter comes before the Court upon Movant James Lyons' ("Lyons") failure to comply with the Court's February 4, 2019 Order and June 11, 2019 directive and this Court's Local Rules. Doc. 2; Dkt. entry dated June 11, 2019; Local R. 11.1. For the following reasons, I **RECOMMEND** the Court **DISMISS** without prejudice Lyons' 28 U.S.C. § 2255 Motion for failure to follow the Court's directives and Local Rules, **DIRECT** the Clerk of Court to **CLOSE** this case and enter the appropriate judgment of dismissal, and **DENY** Lyons leave to appeal *in forma pauperis* and a Certificate of Appealability.¹

¹ A "district court can only dismiss an action on its own motion as long as the procedure employed is fair To employ fair procedure, a district court must generally provide the plaintiff with notice of its intent to dismiss or an opportunity to respond." Tazoe v. Airbus S.A.S., 631 F.3d 1321, 1336 (11th Cir. 2011) (citations and internal quotation marks omitted). A magistrate judge's Report and Recommendation provides such notice and opportunity to respond. See Shivers v. Int'l Bhd. of Elec. Workers Local Union, 349, 262 F. App'x 121, 125, 127 (11th Cir. 2008) (indicating a party has notice of a district court's intent to sua sponte grant summary judgment where a magistrate judge issues a report recommending the sua sponte granting of summary judgment); Anderson v. Dunbar Armored, Inc., 678 F. Supp. 2d 1280, 1296 (N.D. Ga. 2009) (noting report and recommendation served as notice claims would be sua sponte dismissed). This Report and Recommendation constitutes fair notice to Lyons his suit is due to be dismissed. As indicated below, Lyons will have the opportunity to present his objections to this finding, and the presiding district judge will review de novo properly submitted objections. See 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1); Fed. R. Civ. P. 72; see also Glover v. Williams, No. 1:12-CV-3562, 2012 WL 5930633, at *1 (N.D. Ga. Oct. 18, 2012) (explaining magistrate judge's report and recommendation

BACKGROUND

Lyons filed a 28 U.S.C. § 2255 Motion to Vacate, Set Aside, or Correct his Sentence. Doc. 1. The Court ordered Respondent to file any desired response to Lyons' Motion. Doc. 2. By this same Order, the Court advised Lyons he was to "immediately inform this Court in writing of any change in address. Failure to do so will result in dismissal of this case, without prejudice." Id. at 1. Lyons then notified the Clerk of Court of his change of address via a telephone call and was directed to submit a written notice of his change of address, as required. Dkt. entry dated June 11, 2019. However, Lyons failed to do so. In addition, it is likely the address Lyons provided to the Clerk of Court on June 11, 2019, is not his current address, as it appears he was released from the Bureau of Prisons' ("BOP") custody on October 9, 2019. <https://www.bop.gov/inmateloc/>, search for 12650-021, "James Lamar Lyons" (last visited Jan. 22, 2021). Further, under this Court's Local Rule 11.1, all pro se litigants are to notify the Court of any change in address. Lyons has submitted nothing to the Court since filing his Motion. Doc. 1.

DISCUSSION

The Court must now determine how to address Lyons' failure to comply with this Court's directives and Local Rules. For the reasons set forth below, I **RECOMMEND** the Court **DISMISS without prejudice** Lyons' Petition. I also **RECOMMEND** the Court **DIRECT** the Clerk of Court to **CLOSE** this case and enter the appropriate judgment of dismissal and **DENY** Lyons leave to appeal *in forma pauperis* and a Certificate of Appealability.

constituted adequate notice and petitioner's opportunity to file objections provided a reasonable opportunity to respond).

I. Dismissal for Failure to Follow This Court's Directives and Local Rules

A district court may dismiss a movant's claims for failure to prosecute pursuant to Federal Rule of Civil Procedure 41(b) and the court's inherent authority to manage its docket.² Link v. Wabash R.R. Co., 370 U.S. 626 (1962);³ Coleman v. St. Lucie Cnty. Jail, 433 F. App'x 716, 718 (11th Cir. 2011) (citing Fed. R. Civ. P. 41(b) and Betty K Agencies, Ltd. v. M/V MONADA, 432 F.3d 1333, 1337 (11th Cir. 2005)). In particular, Rule 41(b) allows for the involuntary dismissal of a movant's claims where he has failed to prosecute those claims, comply with the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure or local rules, or follow a court order. Fed. R. Civ. P. 41(b); *see also* Coleman, 433 F. App'x at 718; Sanders v. Barrett, No. 05-12660, 2005 WL 2640979, at *1 (11th Cir. Oct. 17, 2005) (citing Kilgo v. Ricks, 983 F.2d 189, 192 (11th Cir. 1993)); *cf.* Local R. 41.1(b) ("[T]he assigned Judge may, after notice to counsel of record, *sua sponte* . . . dismiss any action for want of prosecution, with or without prejudice[,] . . . [based on] willful disobedience or neglect of any order of the Court." (emphasis omitted)). Additionally, a district court's "power to dismiss is an inherent aspect of its authority to enforce its orders and ensure prompt disposition of lawsuits." Brown v. Tallahassee Police Dep't, 205 F. App'x 802, 802 (11th Cir. 2006) (quoting Jones v. Graham, 709 F.2d 1457, 1458 (11th Cir. 1983)).

It is true dismissal with prejudice for failure to prosecute is a "sanction . . . to be utilized only in extreme situations" and requires a court to "(1) conclud[e] a clear record of delay or willful contempt exists; and (2) mak[e] an implicit or explicit finding that lesser sanctions would

² Pursuant to Rule 12 of the Rules Governing Section 2255 Cases, the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure may apply to a § 2255 motion, to the extent the Civil Rules are not inconsistent with the § 2255 Rules.

³ In Wabash, the Court held a trial court may dismiss an action for failure to prosecute "even without affording notice of its intention to do so." 370 U.S. at 633. However, in this case, Lyons was forewarned of the consequences of failing to notify the Court of any change in address in writing. Doc. 2; *see also* Local R. 11.1.

not suffice.” Thomas v. Montgomery Cnty. Bd. of Educ., 170 F. App’x 623, 625–26 (11th Cir. 2006) (quoting Morewitz v. West of Eng. Ship Owners Mut. Prot. & Indem. Ass’n (Lux.), 62 F.3d 1356, 1366 (11th Cir. 1995)); see also Taylor v. Spaziano, 251 F. App’x 616, 619 (11th Cir. 2007) (citing Morewitz, 62 F.3d at 1366). By contrast, dismissal *without* prejudice for failure to prosecute is not an adjudication on the merits, and, therefore, courts are afforded greater discretion in dismissing claims in this manner. Taylor, 251 F. App’x at 619; see also Coleman, 433 F. App’x at 719; Brown, 205 F. App’x at 802–03.

While the Court exercises its discretion to dismiss cases with caution, dismissal of this action without prejudice is warranted. See Coleman, 433 F. App’x at 719 (upholding dismissal without prejudice for failure to prosecute, where plaintiff did not respond to court order to supply defendant’s current address for purpose of service); Brown, 205 F. App’x at 802–03 (upholding dismissal without prejudice for failure to prosecute, where plaintiff failed to follow court order to file amended complaint and court had informed plaintiff that noncompliance could lead to dismissal).

Lyons failed to comply with this Court’s Order to notify the Court in writing of any change in address during the pendency of this action, the Court’s directive to provide a written change of address, and this Court’s Local Rules, despite having ample opportunity to comply and being forewarned of the consequences of his failure to do so. Doc. 2. Thus, the Court should **DISMISS without prejudice** Lyons’ § 2255 Motion.⁴ Doc. 1.

⁴ Alternatively the Court could deny as moot Lyons’ Motion, because, as noted above, he was released from the BOP’s custody. Lyons only requests he be resentenced and released from custody. Friends of Everglades v. S. Fla. Water Mgmt. Dist., 570 F.3d 1210, 1216 (11th Cir. 2009) (“An issue is moot when it no longer presents a live controversy with respect to which the court can give meaningful relief.”). In addition, the Court could deny Lyons’ Motion for the reasons Respondent set forth in the Government’s Response. Doc. 3 at 3–5.

II. Leave to Appeal *in Forma Pauperis* and Certificate of Appealability

The Court should also deny Lyons leave to appeal *in forma pauperis*. Though Lyons has not yet filed a notice of appeal, it would be appropriate to address these issues in the Court's order of dismissal. Fed. R. App. P. 24(a)(3) (trial court may certify appeal of party proceeding *in forma pauperis* is not taken in good faith "before or after the notice of appeal is filed"). An appeal cannot be taken *in forma pauperis* if the trial court certifies that the appeal is not taken in good faith. 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a)(3); Fed. R. App. P. 24(a)(3). Good faith in this context must be judged by an objective standard. Busch v. County of Volusia, 189 F.R.D. 687, 691 (M.D. Fla. 1999). A party does not proceed in good faith when he seeks to advance a frivolous claim or argument. See Coppedge v. United States, 369 U.S. 438, 445 (1962). A claim or argument is frivolous when it appears the factual allegations are clearly baseless or the legal theories are indisputably meritless. Neitzke v. Williams, 490 U.S. 319, 327 (1989); Carroll v. Gross, 984 F.2d 392, 393 (11th Cir. 1993). An *in forma pauperis* action is frivolous and not brought in good faith if it is "without arguable merit either in law or fact." Napier v. Preslicka, 314 F.3d 528, 531 (11th Cir. 2002); see also Brown v. United States, Nos. 407CV085, 403CR001, 2009 WL 307872, at *1–2 (S.D. Ga. Feb. 9, 2009).

Additionally, under 28 U.S.C. § 2253(c)(1), an appeal cannot be taken from a final order in a habeas proceeding unless a certificate of appealability is issued. Pursuant to Rule 11 of the Rules Governing Section 2255 cases, the Court "must issue or deny a certificate of appealability when it enters a final order adverse to the applicant." A certificate of appealability may issue only if the applicant makes a substantial showing of a denial of a constitutional right. The decision to issue a certificate of appealability requires "an overview of the claims in the habeas petition and a general assessment of their merits." Miller-El v. Cockrell, 537 U.S. 322, 336

(2003). In order to obtain a certificate of appealability, a petitioner must show “that jurists of reason could disagree with the district court’s resolution of his constitutional claims or that jurists could conclude the issues presented are adequate to deserve encouragement to proceed further.” Id. “Where a plain procedural bar is present and the district court is correct to invoke it to dispose of the case, a reasonable jurist could not conclude either that the district court erred in dismissing the petition or that the petitioner should be allowed to proceed further.” Slack v. McDaniel, 529 U.S. 473, 484 (2000); see also Franklin v. Hightower, 215 F.3d 1196, 1199 (11th Cir. 2000). “This threshold inquiry does not require full consideration of the factual or legal bases adduced in support of the claims.” Miller-El, 537 U.S. at 336.

Based on the above analysis of Lyons’ failure to comply with this Court’s directives and Local Rules and applying the Certificate of Appealability standards set forth above, there are no discernable issues worthy of a certificate of appealability; therefore, the Court should **DENY** the issuance of a Certificate of Appealability. If the Court adopts this recommendation and denies Lyons a Certificate of Appealability, Lyons is advised he “may not appeal the denial but may seek a certificate from the court of appeals under Federal Rule of Appellate Procedure 22.” Rule 11(a), Rules Governing Section 2255 Cases in the United States District Courts. Furthermore, as there are no non-frivolous issues to raise on appeal, an appeal would not be taken in good faith. Thus, the Court should likewise **DENY** *in forma pauperis* status on appeal.

CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing, I **RECOMMEND** the Court **DISMISS** without prejudice Lyons’s Petition for failure to follow the Court’s directives and Local Rules, **DIRECT** the Clerk of Court to **CLOSE** this case and enter the appropriate judgment of dismissal, and **DENY** Lyons leave to appeal *in forma pauperis*.

Any objections to this Report and Recommendation shall be filed within 14 days of today's date. Objections shall be specific and in writing. Any objection that the Magistrate Judge failed to address a contention raised in the Complaint must be included. Failure to file timely, written objections will bar any later challenge or review of the Magistrate Judge's factual findings and legal conclusions. 28 U.S.C. § 636(b)(1)(C); Harrigan v. Metro Dade Police Dep't Station #4, No. 17-11264, 2020 WL 6039905, at *4 (11th Cir. Oct. 13, 2020). To be clear, a party waives all rights to challenge the Magistrate Judge's factual findings and legal conclusions on appeal by failing to file timely, written objections. Harrigan, 2020 WL 6039905, at *4; 11th Cir. R. 3-1. A copy of the objections must be served upon all other parties to the action.

Upon receipt of objections meeting the specificity requirement set out above, a United States District Judge will make a de novo determination of those portions of the report, proposed findings, or recommendation to which objection is made and may accept, reject, or modify, in whole or in part, the findings or recommendations made herein. Objections not meeting the specificity requirement set out above will not be considered by the District Judge. A party may not appeal a Magistrate Judge's report and recommendation directly to the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit. Appeals may be made only from a final judgment entered by or at the direction of a District Judge.

SO REPORTED and RECOMMENDED, this 22nd day of January, 2021.



BENJAMIN W. CHEESBRO
UNITED STATES MAGISTRATE JUDGE
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF GEORGIA